

State of Rhode Island  
Department of Children, Youth and Families  
John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program Grant Application  
FY 2006

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During the past five years, the Chafee funds have allowed Rhode Island DCYF to begin a process creating infrastructure for services dedicated to older youth in transition. Major accomplishments include:

- Expansion of life skills programming for youth in out of home care;
- Enactment and implementation of a state funded initiative to support college educations for youth in out of home care;
- Increased resources to assist youth in identifying vocational choices and career paths; and
- Establishment of critical collaborative relationships with sister state departments and community agencies to provide support to youth.

In the next five years, we plan to enhance and refine these initiatives to build a truly integrated system to meet the collective and individual needs of these young people. DCYF will be working toward a strategic plan to drive this process. In addition, we will:

- Explore, with Casey Family Services, ways of collaborating more closely in providing services to youth. In particular, DCYF is exploring how we can collaborate more closely to ensure that more transitioning youth participate in asset development and financial literacy through the Jim Casey Foundation Youth Initiative, which currently serves 75 youth. The RI Foster Parents Association and the Rhode Island Council of Resource Providers for Children, Youth and Families ( RICORP ) are also partners in this initiative.
- Work with the RI Foster Parents Association and RICORP to use the vehicle of life skills training to identify service needs of participating youth and to facilitate referrals.
- Increase utilization by youth in out of home placement and providers of a joint website called The Place of Our Own, which is jointly sponsored by Casey, RI Foster Parents Association, and RICORP.
- Collaborate with the RI Department of Labor on increasing vocational readiness and employment opportunities for youth in the care of the DCYF; this work is pursuant to the Philadelphia Youth Forum co-sponsored by the Federal Department of Labor and the Administration for Children and Families.

## **Part I-Program Plan Narrative**

1. The Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families is the state agency in Rhode Island which is charged with providing services to assist families to meet the needs for the safety, protection, and well-being of children, when the family is unable to meet these responsibilities. DCYF was created in 1980 with the merging of children's programs previously administered by four different state agencies. This established the integration of three major public responsibilities for troubled children, youth and families (Child Welfare, Children's Behavioral Health, and Juvenile Corrections) into one agency. The Department is the state agency which will administer, supervise, and oversee the programs carried out under this plan.

2. DCYF agrees to cooperate in national evaluations of the programs implemented.

### **3. Programs Designed and Conducted to Achieve the Purposes of Section 477(b)(2)(A) and 477(a)(1-5) of the Act to:**

#### **a.) Help youth make the transition to self-sufficiency:**

It is the goal of the Department that youth likely to transition to adulthood from the Department's care are prepared for a self-sufficient and productive adult life. Youth may remain in care until they reach their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. It is the policy of the DCYF that all youth 16 and over in out of home care participate in a life skills assessment utilizing the Daniel Memorial Life Skills Assessment tool. Following the assessment, each youth is offered an opportunity to participate in the Daniel Memorial Life Skills Training Curriculum which provides 100 hours of formal instruction in 14 skill areas, including: educational planning, housing, and interpersonal skills.

Concurrent with formal life skill training, through contracted services, utilizing state funds, DCYF provides a continuum of placements which allow for the learning and practicing of skills necessary to live independently. Placements include: shelters, group homes, supervised apartments and independent scattered site apartments, as well as hospitals, residential centers, relative foster care and non relative foster care.

Within each level, services include: case management, supervision and support, counseling and guidance, room and board, medical coverage, life skills, individual and group therapy, and assistance with access to educational, employment, and transitional services. All of the placement services are provided with state funding, which allows limited Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) funds to be utilized to fund services not available with other funding.

At each level of care, goals and expectations are set to move toward self-sufficiency. From group home to supervised apartment to independent living there is increase in the amount of control and responsibility each participant is required to assume and a decrease in the level of supervision and support provided. Throughout the continuum; supervision, counseling, guidance, and support consistent with the youth needs are provided to assist in acquiring the skills to move to the next level.

A Transitional Living Plan is also developed in conjunction with the youth's case plan.

This plan is developed by the Department Social Worker in consultation with the youth and other significant agencies and individuals. A Discharge Plan is developed, in a similar manner six months prior to discharge to insure that all goals for discharge have been met and all necessary supports anticipated are in place. This Case Plan, including the Transitional Living Plan and Discharge Plan, is reviewed by the Administrative Review Unit at meetings which occur every 6 months for quality assurance purposes.

Enhancing the Planning Process: The DCYF has been exploring ways that the ARU can assist in and enhance the quality of the case planning process. We are exploring ways of capturing of data which could be used to increase inclusion of youth and critical community partners and supports in planning as well as identifying key service and support needs. Specifically, we are exploring ways of collecting information regarding:

- the number of youth invited to and who attend the ARU reviews;
- the significant people in the youth's life whom the youth see as important;
- educational attainment such as high school graduation or receiving a GED; and
- employment.

Enhancing Life Skills Training: The Life Skills Curriculum is implemented through a contract with the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association, which operates the Life Skills Center, and provides this service to youth placed in foster homes. With additional funding from CFCIP, the Department has also implemented a life skills program for youth in group placement. The RICORP provides life skills training to these youth. We have developed more integration and collaboration over the past two years between the Life Skills Programming for foster youth and those in other forms of out of home placement, which has allowed more efficient use of resources through cost and resource sharing. This year graduations have been combined and there is a plan to move to a shared location to integrate administration and services provided by the programs.

A backlog of approximately 120 youth waiting for life skills developed several years ago, which had continued due to funding limitations. Until recently, we lacked the capacity and funding to resolve this backlog. In 2005, collaboration between DCYF, The Rhode Island Foster Parents Association, and RICORP produced a 3 year grant from the United Way Of South Eastern New England for an after school program, which allows for an additional youth to receive life skills training and will eliminate the backlog by 2008.

**b.) Help youth receive the education, training and services necessary to obtain employment:**

There are several ways in which we support the vocational training and placement of youth in care. Through the Life Skills Curriculum, about 130 youth per year are provided with information and training in job seeking (3hrs), job maintenance (3hrs), job retention; and personal presentation, including, hygiene and appearance (3hrs).

In addition, through a contract with Work Opportunities Unlimited, a jobs/career development program, services are provided to about 60 youth per year. These services include the full range of vocational assessment, employment seeking, and job support and

retention services. Job Coaches work with each youth to identify interests and needs and to assist youth in developing and implementing vocational plans. Coaches help youth understand the wealth of resources available through the One Stop Centers, which have been established by the Department of Labor and Training to concentrate employment and vocational resources in easily accessible locations. These One Stop Centers are located in six places statewide, so that state residents are within 25 minutes of at least one center. The One Stops bring services from three key state departments, the Department of Human Services (which includes TANF and Rehabilitative Services), the Department of Labor and Training, and 9 – 10 community agencies under the same roof. The One Stops offer career exploration, assessment, training, and support in job entry and retention.

There are also several other employment related initiatives which continue to develop, including: the Casey / UPS School to Career initiative and the beginning of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative in Rhode Island. These programs are both under the auspices of Casey Family Services. The School to Career Program has been operational for four years and provides job placement and support for youth in foster care and youth in the community. Within the past 1 ½ years the program has been working mostly with youth who have completed the Work Opportunity Unlimited program who continue to require support.

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative Program provides assistance to youth who are or have been in foster care to provide financial literacy training, asset building, and community connections and mentoring. The program has a capacity of up to 75 youth per year taking part. The plan is to involve 75 youth per year for a total of 225 over three years. There is also an advisory board made up of youth which provides input and direction from the youth perspective.

AS 220 is the other organization which provides employment related services through a contract with the Department. It is an arts program which provides opportunities for youth to develop artistic talents and express themselves in a number of ways. The contract provides funds for stipends to youth who demonstrate interest and initiative after a period of volunteer involvement. The participants are given an opportunity to work with adult artist to develop skills in art and business and to eventually produce a product which could be sold for profit. The contract funds 30 to 40 youth per year.

The Department is exploring the possibility of having Work Opportunities Unlimited provide technical assistance to community group home and independent living providers on assisting youth with job exploration, seeking, and retention. By enhancing the skills of the full range of community providers, we hope to increase vocational supports to more youth than current funding would normally allow.

The DCYF and the Department of Labor and Training have formed a close collaboration since the fall, 2004, Shared Youth Vision Forum in Philadelphia. Together with other key stakeholders, including the Department of Education, the Governor's Justice Commission, and the Work Force Investment Boards, the DCYF is working to develop

integrated strategies to serve the neediest youth, including youth in out of home care due to child welfare issues, children and youth with behavioral health needs, and youth with juvenile justice involvement. This state team has presented to both Department directors and has been deputized to develop comprehensive plans, to be presented to the directors, to integrate services to these youth. In the last month, the DCYF and DLT submitted a proposal to the federal Department of Labor for funding to support joint programming for 200 youth, including youth with both child welfare and juvenile justice involvement. Even if this particular proposal is not funded, it is reflective of the depth of the relationship that has developed and which is expected to continue.

**c.) Help youth prepare for and enter postsecondary training and educational institutions:**

In 1999, RI legislation was passed, primarily due to the efforts and testimony of our Youth Advisory Board, to provide state funding to assist youth in foster care to attend the University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, and the Community College of Rhode Island. This allocation has increased from \$ 50,000 initially to \$ 200,000 in state FY 2003. This funding assures that a student, once qualified, may attend college for 8 semesters by maintaining a positive academic standing. We have promoted this initiative through ongoing education and communication through all staff e-mail, ads in the Foster Parent newsletter, through presentations at the Life Skills Centers, at the annual Youth Conference through a resource fair and through word of mouth. *The Place of Our Own Website* has increased awareness of the availability of funding, as has communication with school Principals and Guidance Counselors in all 39 school districts in Rhode Island. Within the DCYF Website, there is also an Independent Living Page and a Youth Advisory Board page. This has further increased access, since it includes a copy of the application form and release of information form which can be downloaded. The development of these Websites has provided information about the full range of supportive programming, as well as links to other resources such as the Rhode Island Foster Parent Association website, the Orphan Foundation, the National Foster Parents Association, and other important information such as scholarships, school to career, and Department of Labor and Training One Stop Centers. In the five years of the program's existence, a total of 150 students have received assistance in paying for expenses related to attending college.

To increase the numbers of youth taking advantage of this opportunity and to begin educational planning as early as possible, a conference for youth from 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades is held annually to promote, educate and encourage youth to be aware of the requirements to graduate from high school and to enter the postsecondary institution which best meets their career goals. During the past five years, the number attending the Educational Conference has increased and the number of youth graduating from high school or obtaining a GED and entering post secondary education has increased.

The addition of Educational and Training Vouchers expands youths' options, including vocational schools, and has allowed for the creation of a complete continuum of educational services, giving youth in care the same opportunities as youth in the general population. It also provides flexibility in choice for youth who do not desire to or are

suited to college and the lengthy commitment to obtain a four degree.

We are in the initial stages of a collaboration with the Departments of Labor, Education, and Office of Rehabilitation Services to develop a process for providing vocational assessments for youth beginning at 14 years of age. Because statistics suggest that 40 to 60 % of youth in care may have disabilities and many have Individual Education Plans under IDEA, a substantial group of youth in care are almost certainly entitled to these vocational assessments. These assessments will assist youth in making decisions about educational goals and programs for high school and beyond. These assessments will also guide effective use of resources including, but not limited to, various educational funding sources, Work Opportunities Unlimited, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, the One Stop Centers, etc. This collaboration will also enhance funding sources for vocational and educational programming; as many youth will be eligible for funding through the Office of Rehabilitative Services due to disabilities as well as the Local Education Authorities due to eligibility through IDEA.

**d.) Provide personal and emotional support through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults:**

Long lasting, supportive, and caring relationships with adults are critical to success in the transition to adulthood. Therefore, it is vital to assist young people in identifying those adults already in their lives who can continue to provide “family” support.

The Life Skills Programs, through their alumni programs, are providing a good deal of ongoing support. There is a need to plan how these supports can be continued long term, through the development of community relationships, after cases have been closed.

This year, Professional Women in Education, is assisting in a program to provide mentors to students receiving our Higher Education Incentive grant. Beginning in November of '04, the group has recruited and trained volunteers with 10 already providing support to students and an additional 30 being trained.

The process of providing mentors, while maintaining the safety and well-being of our youth, is labor intensive; it requires staff dedicated to recruitment, training, and supporting mentors and mentees. These issues remain a barrier to providing this resource. However, we firmly believe in the need for caring adults to assist our youth to become successful adults and plan to promote and advocate for permanence for older youth in care.

**e.) Provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and supports and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years of age.**

All services offered to those under 18 years of age, are available to those between 18 and 21. Youth 18 to 21 may remain active with the Department and avail themselves of a full array of services including: \*room and board, case management, life skills, education, counseling, and preparation for self-sufficiency.

\*Room and board is defined as those elements required to live with reasonable health, safety, and comfort including: security deposits, rent, some utilities, food and some clothing. Depending on the individual needs, this can be short term (six months or less) or ongoing (several years), and can extend until the youth reaches 21.

For those over 16 to 18, almost the exact array of services are available, including housing, financial assistance for food, clothing, furnishings, medical, counseling, and support and guidance in making important decisions about directions in career and life.

Rhode Island continues to support youth remaining in care voluntarily from 18 to 21 and to utilize state funds to support housing and allowing limited Chafee funds to be utilized for other projects where no funding has been available, such as Teen Grant and Work Opportunities Unlimited.

**f.) Promoting collaboration to maximize resources available for transitioning youth:** Overarching all IL services will be the need for collaboration and integration to enhance and expand the capability of providers, community partners and DCYF to work more effectively to assist our youth to achieve the goal of self sufficiency. For a number of years, we convened a Providers Committee, which included all independent Living Providers and Foster care representatives to assist in system development. This committee will be reinstituted to identify specific opportunities for collaboration, integration and cost/resource sharing.

#### **4. Brief description of how all political subdivisions in the state are served by the program (Section 477(b)(2)(B)).**

Because of its relatively small size and population, Rhode Island has no other significant political subdivisions, except for its 39 cities and towns. The DCYF is responsible for all independent living services at the local level. The Department of Children, Youth and Families is divided into 4 regions for the purpose of provision of services and services are provided equally in all regions. Under the plan and goals for the department through family-centered practice, services and resources will be provided as close to the youth's home as possible, with all planning and provision of services provided by region.

#### **Description of how youth of various ages and at various stages of achieving independence, are to be served. ( Section 477)(b)(2)(C).**

Independent Living services are available to all eligible youth on a statewide basis. IL services are formally provided to youth 16 and over. However, within the continuum of placements, youth under 16 are placed in group homes and foster homes and receive instruction in life skills, such as grocery shopping and laundry, etc. Those 16 and over are eligible for formal life skills training and usually have more opportunity for more hands on kinds of skill building, in moving toward more independent functioning. They also have an opportunity to move closer to independence, by living in a supervised apartment, with more responsibility and more involvement in performing daily tasks and skills required in a less structured environment. Those 18 and over are usually moving toward



more independence in establishing their own apartment and developing skills to bring them to complete independence and decision making. They can remain in care until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

During the upcoming year, more emphasis will be placed upon concurrent planning for older youth. Permanence and connections to caring adults, as well as additional emphasis on enhancing skills required for successful transition to adulthood, will be made the overarching focus of all youth related activities. The DCYF Program Improvement Plan's recommending a review for appropriateness of all cases of older youth listed as other alternative placement, is one example of this emphasis.

### **Those Likely to Remain in Care**

The determination of those likely to remain in care is made based upon the availability of appropriate alternatives in each youth's situation, and recommendations for continued placement are determined individually. However, youth between 16 and 20 who have no stable family, who have had parental rights terminated, or who can benefit from continued assistance and support are most likely to remain in care to 18 and beyond.

Age (under 21 years ) and specific problems in self-sufficiency ( lack of job skills, lack of adequate living alternative ) are indicators of need to continue in care. Services will continue to be offered to each youth based upon the needs determined in the case plan process. As long as needs exist, appropriate services will continue to age 21. Emphasis will be on the development and implementation of the plan by the time the youth reaches the age of 21.

### **6. Description of how the state involves the public and private sectors in helping adolescents in foster care achieve independence.**

DCYF has collaborated with a number of agencies in providing independent living services. Through contracts with independent living providers, RICORP, and the Foster Parents Association, the Department continues to develop a coalition to assist youth to move toward independence. The Foster Parents Association and RICORP provide all life skills assessment and training to consolidate and enhance this process. We also have involved other agencies on our Independent Living Advisory Committee along with DCYF staff from each geographic region. And have been in discussion with the Narragansett Tribe about services available to Indian children and youth.

We have been involved in discussions regarding mutual interests in services to youth and resources which would be available to our youth in care. We have had discussions of varying content with school to career agencies, the Department of Labor and Training Rhode Island Department of Human Services, the Work Force Investment Boards' Youth Councils, the University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, the Community College of Rhode Island, Travelers Aid, the Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Corporation, the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, the Rhode Island Commission for the Homeless, the Federal Office of Certified Apprenticeship Programs, Casey Family

Services, United Parcel Services, CVS Pharmacy, Women and Infants Hospital, Johnson and Wales University, New England Technical Institute, Good will Industries of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Transitional Council for Handicapped Students, and The Rhode Island Parent Information Network.

Specifically, this past year, we are involved with the DLT Shared Vision for Youth Committee RI Team, The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, and the new federal Regional Job Corp Center which opened very recently in Rhode Island. We believe this is a developmental, ongoing process which will produce opportunities for our young people to receive pre-employment and employment skill building and career development. Collaboration and resource development are key components in expanding and enhancing services. We have initiated or plan to involve the following organizations in assisting our young people to attain success. We have had more involved contacts with the following agencies:

- Casey-ongoing relation of over 5 years-work on Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative
- Workforce Investment Board Youth Councils-ongoing relationship as member of Youth Councils and in regard to the Shared Youth Vision
- ORS-working on process for evaluation and funding to provide a career path for youth with handicapping condition
- Colleges and Vocational Schools-ongoing to assist youth enter programs to obtain all available services and funding
- School to Career-ongoing to improve access and develop linkage to other resources
- NetWork Rhode Island to provide access and develop a process to integrate services
- RI Higher Ed Authority-Initiating to provide linkage, access and additional resources
- Crusade for Higher Ed-Following up to expand opportunities for additional funding and services
- Federal Apprenticeship Program- to develop a process to provide access for apprenticeships
- Shared Youth Vision-developing to provide access to youth in care to opportunities and services through the Department of Labor

**7. Description of the objective criteria the state uses for determining eligibility for benefits and services under the programs, including the process for developing the criteria. ( Section 477)(b)(2)(E) ).**

Eligibility for independent living services is based upon age and living arrangement and opportunity is available to all youth 16 and over in out of home care statewide. The criteria was developed consistent with the policy to develop a transitional living plan and is , partially, by the financial limits which exit. Additional funding would allow services to begin at 12 or 14 instead of 16.

The Daniel Memorial Life Skills Assessment and Curriculum are made available through Contract with the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association to all youth 16 and over in foster care. The same services are available to all youth living in group care. This program is administered by RICORP, to which all programs, in state, providing services to DCYF clients belong. Teen Grants are grants (up to \$400.00 ) made available to youth 14 and over in care, which enhance their movement toward self-sufficiency.

**Medicaid coverage for youth 18-21**

Rhode Island DCYF supports Medicaid coverage for youth 18-20, who have left care. A request had been made to the Department of Human Services which administers the funds and is required to amend its plan to provide such coverage. Because of cost factors and funding issues, we were not able to obtain approval for this service to be provided. We are continuing to pursue this plan and to work with DHS to achieve this valuable asset for these youth.

Recent developments have created a new Office of Health and Human Services Agencies, including DHS, the agency which provides Medicaid, and DCYF. Hopefully, with more potential for direct collaboration among this group of agencies, we may be able to advocate more effectively to overcome barriers to allowing this important coverage for older youth leaving care.

**Positive Youth Development**

Consistent with the philosophy of positive youth development, the Department has involved youth in the process of planning, through an active Youth Advisory Board.

The Youth Advisory Board is based upon the commitment to youth involvement in planning their own programs. The Youth Advisory Board has been active in advocating for educational legislation, which provides funding for education expenses for college, has developed and administered a survey to youth in care to obtain the youths' perception about the quality of care, has participated in a focus group to obtain input from youth about the case plan review process, and is completing a handbook for youth in care to better answer questions youth have about being in care. The Youth Advisory Board will also be involved in the ongoing development of the websites previously noted and with the websites up and running, the Department will have an opportunity to receive more

feedback and recommendations from all youth in care.

During the coming year an increased emphasis will be placed upon youth involvement in all aspects of program from participation on boards and committees to training of staff and foster parent to case planning

Some youth from the Board currently participate in staff and foster parent training and will continue to be involved with this and other training and promotion. Other youth are also involved on the Teen Grant Committee, in planning the annual Youth Conference, and in judging the annual logo contest

.Also, as a priority, training for agency staff, community staffs, and foster and adoptive parents will continue to be expanded, enhanced, and integrated with other training and will include more youth involvement. Currently, training is provided to DCYF and other agency residential staffs, around issues on aging out, transition, life skills, adolescent development and positive youth development. All components are carry out by Kathi Crowe, a nationally known consultant, working with the IL Program, who coordinates with the Child Welfare Institute staff and with youth to participate in training.

Funding for this training is separate from Chafee funds.

### **Consultation and Collaboration with Indian tribes**

Rhode Island has one recognized tribe-the Narragansetts. We have entered into discussion with members of the tribe as a department, with a number of DCYF staff participating. Initially, Kathi Crowe and John O'Riley met with Winona Harris, the head of Social Services and provided her with written information about the Chafee Program, explaining that services are available to Indian youth that are available to all other youth 16 and older in out of home care.

Discussions continue with more global issues of tribal investigations of allegations and involvement of a tribal judge being given priority at this time.

### **Coordination with other Federally Funded Programs**

We have been working jointly with the Project Hope Program which provides mental health services to juveniles transitioning from the Justice system to insure services to that population are available when reunification is not possible and the youth remains in out of home placement. Data indicates that 41% of youth incarcerated in Rhode Island have a RICHIST documented history indicated child abuse. We have also been working together youth on the DLT Shared Vision for Youth Committee, with Workforce Development Youth Councils, School to Career and the Juvenile Justice Commission to develop resources for youth transitioning to receive services for job placement, training, and education.

### **Educational and Training Voucher Program**

Educational and Training Vouchers have continued to be a valuable resource to allow more options to youth in order to customize choices to meet their individual needs. During the past year, 40 youth have received funds to attend 25 different programs.

Program development continues to be a priority. Emphasis has been placed on promotion of the program collaboration with schools and agencies to develop an integrated process focused on education and training leading to employment and a career path for the future.

### **Goals and Objective for 2005-2006**

- **Improve and increase promotion and awareness of the program**
- **Increase and enhance collaboration with other agencies and educational facilities**
- **Integrate education, job training and job placement**
- **Involve more youth in planning and promotion**
- **Increase mentoring for youth receiving ETV's**
- **Improve and expand funding from multiple sources to assist youth attending private colleges to avoid loans**
- **Enhance relationships with ORS, Job Corp, The Children's Crusade, and DLT One Stop Centers**
- **Increase and enhance mentoring available**
- **Recruit and nurture involvement of administrators from among the schools and colleges students are choosing to attend to be part of a planning effort to produce success for those students**

### **Criteria for Eligibility for Programs**

To be eligible a youth must:

1. be 16 or over
2. live in out of home care

Funding limits support keeping 16-21 as the age for eligibility.

### **8. Description of how the state ensures fair and equitable treatment of benefit recipients. (Section 477 (b)(2)(E) ).**

All eligible youth have an opportunity to apply for existing services. All applications are acted upon in a timely manner and services are provided, based upon availability of funds. For those programs providing direct funding to youth, a committee composed of youth and program staff review the applications without knowledge of the applicants' identity. Any completion stipends made available are paid equally to all who meet the requirements.